WHEN IS A POLICY NOT A POLICY?

It would be so much easier if things were simply right or wrong; good or bad. But few things are that simple, and that includes library policies. You have heard many times that the board adopts policy and the director sees that it is carried out—a seemingly simple formula. However, there's more to it.

A new library director recently asked his regional librarian if he needed to get the board's approval to adjust the time limits on public computer terminals, clearly concerned that he might be overstepping his authority to change a "policy" on his own. Perhaps it might be better understood if we think of it in relation to governmental structure. The director is like the executive branch, and just as presidents and governors issue "Executive Orders" without the involvement of congress or the legislature, so should library management as well. This brings us to the discussion of which policies are the purview of the board and which are best left to the director.

Actually, the issue brings us back to trustees micro-managing the operations of the library, which is not a good thing. Boards hire directors who have education, training, and experience in a field of study called library science because they, as citizen volunteers, do not have this expertise. To return to our previous example, who better than the librarian would know what time limits are reasonable for public computer use? Should the trustees spend their valuable time guessing whether 30 minutes is long enough or if one hour is too long?

Mostly it is common sense which policies are governance policies and must be determined by the library board. These are those with broad parameters for how the library will operate to accomplish its mission. Examples include adopting the annual budget and planning for the future. On the other hand, most operational policies are part of the day-to-day managing of the library and should be administered by the director. The above example on computer usage, or dress codes for staff, are good examples of management polices.

Delegating management authority is often a difficult task for trustees and determining how much the board does itself and how much it delegates can be a cause of conflict. The key is a clear understanding of each party's role, good communication between all concerned, and a healthy spirit of teamwork. This is not a turf battle; this is everyone doing his or her job to make the library be the best library it can be.

ANNUAL REPORTS: A GUIDED TOUR

About this time each year your library director is probably looking worn and frazzled and, if you're brave enough to ask, will tell you the contributing factor has been the Annual Report. Your director will probably give each of you your very own copy, anticipating you will read all thirty-one pages right away, and come to the next meeting full of insightful comments and questions.

For reasons professional librarians seldom understand, trustees are not generally as excited as they are at the completion of this particularly comprehensive document. Much of this ennui can be blamed on the format, for even the most ardent fan of all the facts contained within, will readily admit it looks daunting—and, to be honest, boring. Ah, but it's not. Within those 31 pages is the story of what your public library has done over the past year. There are the triumphs and tragedies, the ups and down, and the physical and fiscal picture of library services in your community. All it takes is a little of your time here and there. Like many items of non-fiction, the Annual Report is best read and digested in short installments and not necessarily in the order in which it is written.

What should the trustee look for in the typical Annual Report? The first item of interest would be page 2, where the expectations of your library are listed in 9 statements, along with the statutory authorization for state support in funding local libraries.

Pages 3-12 give you the financial snapshot of the past year: how much revenue was taken in and how the money was spent to provide library services. ([No one expects you to read every check listed, but others need these to verify all state funds were spent.)

Following the financial pages are those dedicated to extension or outreach services. In Kentucky, the most common form of providing countywide service [*see page 2, item 2*] is via a bookmobile, but that is not the only way—others use branches, some both, and still others unique ways that work for them. By page 17, the physical facilities have been enumerated for all sites, stationary or mobile, and neatly totaled.

Library staffing is addressed on pages 18-19, including non-paid staff such as volunteers and "program" workers. Here is a quick look at how many of your staff that need certification have it and, obviously, how many do not as yet.

Starting on page 20 is information on the library's holdings—the purpose, one might say, of the library's existence. First is a recap of the actual collection size, broken down by several different categories. The following page details the circulation these materials have had, including those used in the library rather than checked out and information accessed via computers. The next page, number 23, addresses library materials that have been loaned to or borrowed from other libraries. It might prove enlightening to compare the collection size, the circulation, and the expenditures [*see page 9*] of any given category—audio books, for example.

The next area of interest addresses, on page 24, the various programs for different age groups offered by the library during the past year. These are followed by an accounting, both narrative and numerical, of the public relations efforts made; a listing that might invite a comparison with how much was spent to accomplish this [*see page 10, line 73*].

ANNUAL REPORTS continued

Intellectual Freedom is examined on page 25. Libraries report any attempts at censoring, identifying them at four separate levels: complaint, challenge, attack, and censorship. In addition to listing any occurrences, a short description of the incident(s) and the library's response is also required, along with the actual titles of the items in contention.

Page 26 summarizes the library's technology and invites a comparison to the computer use (aka in-house circulation) on page 21 and electronic access costs detailed on page 11 as a category of operational expenditures.

With few, if any, exceptions, the page disliked most by library directors is number 27. Often referred to as the "essay question," this is the one that asks for the director's subjective opinion on the current status of the library. It is here that strengths, weaknesses, successes, and challenges are noted. Unlike the other pages that call for short, specific answers, this one expects a narrative answer. In addition to the current status, it is here that the library's plans for the future are also described. All trustees should read this page—even if they postpone looking at the statistical information for a later time.

As you near the end of the Annual Report you will find a list, on page 28, of thirty-four specific polices. The Report asks if the library has these in formal written versions and the date each was last revised. Not every policy listed is one that is *legally* required, but many are, and all are recommended. In addition to having them, it is important that they be reviewed periodically. While there is no set rule, most agree that annually is ideal, with biennially being acceptable.

Pages 29 and 30 list the library board members. You are the very best proofreader of this page; if you see any errors in your address or phone number, please call it to the attention of your director. Here, too, is the information about when your term expires, how many meeting you attended, and how many continuing education opportunities you attended.

Finally, we come to the last page—#31. Here at the end is the single most important question: *"Does your library wish to apply for state support?"* Look back on page 3, line 9. This is the amount of your state aid grant and this Annual Report is your library's application for that grant in the coming year. Perhaps now the mystery of why the Annual Report is as unflattering in format as it is can be explained—it's a grant application!

Final thought: Hollywood has led us to believe even plain Janes (and Joes) can be "fixed up" to look glamorous. So why not apply the same strategy to the Annual Report? Suggest someone at your library put all that hard work and excellent information into a glamorous report, a series of bookmarks, etc to share with your community.

LIBRARY LETTERS

Dear Marian Librarian,

As President of the Board I sign the Annual Report. Does it matter if I do this before the regional librarian has reviewed it?

-- Troubled Trustee

Dear Troubled,

That's pretty much dependent upon how strict you are about your signature on an official document. Yours, as board president, is the only one that is certifying the accuracy of the information in the report. This is why it is also the only signature that has to be notarized. It is not uncommon for the regional librarian to find errors—mostly minor ones, but not always—when reviewing the Annual Report. This is why the line for that person's signature preceeds yours. Done in chronological order, it adds assurance that the document is indeed correct when it is handed over to you for your signature.

HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW?

The following quiz will let you test your knowledge on the topics covered in this publication. The answers are under "Publications" on KDLA's web page **http://www.kdla.net**.

1. Why shouldn't the board deal with all policies and forget about trying to figure out if they are governance or management?

2. Why should trustees bother themselves with the Annual Report? Isn't that what we hired our director to do?

3. What is the big deal about the Annual Report anyway? It's just another bureaucratic document we have to file, isn't it?

4. Does our library have to have all those policies listed on page 28?

5. How might we share the information contained in the Annual Report in a more reader-friendly way?

ANSWERS TO T³ QUIZ:

1. **Why shouldn't the board deal with all policies and forget about trying to figure out if they are governance or management?** *[page 1]*
Because that would be micro-managing your director and not letting her do her job. Of course the board makes broad governance policies that affect the direction in which the library is moving, its future plans, its mission.   Also recognize that a board of citizen volunteers cannot possibly have the time or expertise to manage something as complex as the library. That does not mean, however, that the board in any way delegates its responsibility for the whole organization and all that happens in it. The board continually evaluates, both formally and informally, the entire library operation as it functions under the management of the director.

2. **Why should trustees bother themselves with the Annual Report? Isn't that what we hired our director to do?** *[page 2-3]*
The Annual Report provides each trustee with a concise, objective picture of all the library has done during the past fiscal year. It is of even more value if one compares it to previous years' reports to see if services have increased or not; if new services/programs have been offered; if progress has been made in a variety of areas. How else can you sound authoritative when you answer your neighbor's question about how much books are still circulating in this Internet age? What will you say to the colleague at work who asks about funding for the library in the economic downturn? How will you know if the library is thriving and how will you hold your director accountable for doing a good job or not? Of course, no one expects the trustees to actually do *the Annual Report—delegate that to your director (and don't be surprised if he delegates bits and pieces to other staff), but be aware of the big picture it paints for you.*

3. **What is the big deal about the Annual Report anyway? It's just another bureaucratic document we have to file, isn't it?** *[page 3]*
OK, you're right that it is something you have to file; you may *be right that it is a bureaucratic document since it does have that visual impact; but it is a big deal. Most importantly, it is a big deal to your library in that it is your application for state aid funds. Important to others, most notably KDLA, are the statistics that must be sent to the federal government.*

4. **Does our library have to have all those policies listed on page 28?** *[page 3]*
Not all are required in the legal sense, though several are—most notably copyright, sexual harassment, ADA. Some, while not having a KRS or KAR or US Code specifically naming them, are necessary to abide by other laws—work week being a perfect example. According to Fair Labor Standards (a very serious federal law), any covered employee (which would be most support staff) must be paid wages at 1½ their rate of pay for any hours worked in excess of 40 in one week. So, one would have to know exactly, to the minute, when the workweek begins at any given library. All policies listed on this page, however, are recommended.

5. **How might we share the information contained in the Annual Report in a more reader-friendly way?** *[page 4]*
This too is something the board might delegate and so might the director. It belongs in the hands of someone with flair and artistic talent. Repackaging the statistical information into something fun and eye-catching is the idea. Limit the amount of information and feed your audience in small doses if need be. A reader-friendly report, flyer, series of bookmarks, etc. might be just the thing. Find an imaginative person (maybe even a volunteer) and let her loose!